

Indiana University: Making Communities SAVI

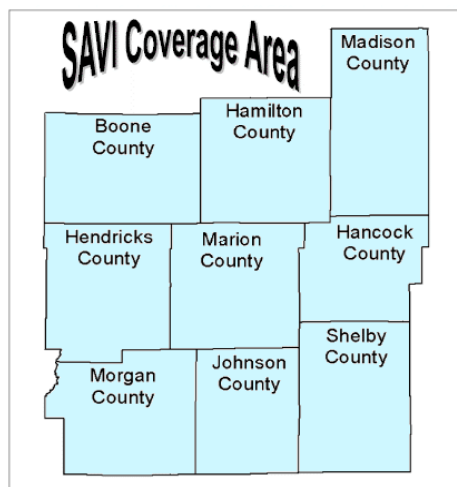
by
Don Druker
TOP Program Officer

Community information systems typically start from the straightforward premise that members of the community need certain kinds of relevant and timely data presented in a usable online format. It sounds simple enough, but it requires that decisions about what kind of information to present, how to present it, and how it will be accessed have to be made fairly early in the process. Typically, these systems work for a while, and then, periodically, need to be retooled. New information resources have to be added, interfaces redesigned, software upgraded.

An “adaptive” system application, however, continually collects information on *how the system is used* by individuals and adapts things to support both the typical exploration process of new users and the more analytical processes of more experienced users. An adaptive system *learns* from its users.



Indiana University’s **Making Communities SAVI** project uses adaptive technology to help underserved communities get access to relevant and understandable data about their



communities and use it effectively to address issues affecting their lives. SAVI stands for **Social Assets and Vulnerabilities Indicators**, a system the University has developed as a comprehensive data warehouse of social indicators from the nine-county Indianapolis Metropolitan Statistical Area. Through SAVI, communities are able to look at a wealth of information from over forty federal, state, and local sources (including census, crime, vital statistics, education, and community assets) with most of the data mapped at the neighborhood level.

Making Communities SAVI takes the original SAVI project to the next level by storing expert knowledge based on patterns of system use. The trick is to bridge technological learning gaps faced by users who need more intuitive ways

to access data. Ultimately, this approach enables community residents to become more active contributors to community development strategies.

A collaboration of Indiana University's Polis Center, the Westside Cooperative Organization of Indianapolis, the George Washington Community School, the Office of Neighborhood Resources at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, and the Westside Community Advisory Board, this project will enable community residents to use SAVI data to work out community-based scenarios for dealing with common problems. The impact on Indiana University will also be dramatic. Increasingly, SAVI data will be integrated into community focused curricula in the school's general studies. Officials from the University expect to see a 50 percent increase in "teacher engagement in civic projects, resulting from the use of data and technology based on modeled community scenarios."

As teachers learn more about how adaptive systems technologies work, they will be better equipped to create curriculum and encourage the use of technology in class. As community residents become more comfortable with the system, they will be able to form new collaborations, thus leveraging resources and building community capacity. Out of this will come a robust and adaptable new model for communities who want to make maximum use of their information resources.

As the project rolls out over the next several months, the substantial implications for economic/community development, adult training and learning, and K-12 education should become clear.